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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0602
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 001293

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: LAWYERS, POLITICAL PARTIES PROTEST CHIEF JUSTICE'S
SUSPENSION

REF: ISLAMABAD 1280 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Peter Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)
)

11. (SBU) On March 21, lawyers and political party members took to the streets once again to protest the suspension of Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. Except for a report that police in Quetta injured several demonstrators, protests nationwide were peaceful.

Islamabad: A group of 300-400 protesters braved heavy morning rains to march from The Blue Area (Islamabad's business district) to the Supreme Court. The weather cleared by midday and approximately 2,500 to 3,000 eventually gathered in front of the Supreme Court. The protest, which was peaceful, dispersed by late afternoon. Protesters included lawyers as well as representatives from both secular political parties -- Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Former cricketer Imran Khan's micro party Tehrik-e-Insaf -- and the religious political party coalition Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA). PPP and MMA protesters exchanged public barbs at one another during the protests. The MMA criticized the PPP for distancing itself from the rest of the opposition, while the PPP fired back at the MMA for supporting President Musharraf in passing the 17th amendment to the constitution, which legitimized Musharraf's 1999 takeover.

Lahore: The various Punjab Bar associations called a protest on The Mall (the main street in Lahore's Central Business District). Approximately 1,000 marched toward The Mall to the Punjab High Court building. By midday, 2,000 - 3,000 lawyers had gathered to protest in front of the Punjab High Court. Police contacts report that everything was calm, although lawyers blocked traffic and shut down the city's central

business district. Police were under strict instructions from the city and provincial governments not to confront the lawyers and to allow them access to protest on The Mall, unlike in previous days. Religious party Jamiat-e-Islami (JI) officials "greeted" the lawyers along the march route, but did not mobilize their members for the protest. Crowds dispersed by mid-afternoon without incident.

Peshawar: There were no visible demonstrations of significant size since March 19. There have been small gatherings of several students or local residents, including a small group assembled outside Bala Hissar Fort on March 21, but they have not fomented wider protests. In NWFP, the nationwide strike of courts will likely empty courtrooms on March 22, but post does not expect further demonstrations.

Karachi: Approximately 250 lawyers attended protest meetings and rallies at the city courts in Karachi. The Sindh High Court and Karachi Bar Association cancelled their plans to stage a rally/sit-in at the Chief Minister's residence, so street protests in Karachi were limited to scattered JI demonstrations at approximately 70 crossroads around Karachi.

Quetta: Lawyers in Quetta hoisted black flags at the Pakistan Bar Council headquarters, boycotted court proceedings, and protested in the streets. Turnout numbers were limited (media reports estimated 200), as lawyers in Quetta are divided on the issue of whether to support Justice Chaudhry. (Note: Some blame Chaudhry, who is from Balochistan, for brokering deals with the military and not taking notice of security operations or the killing of prominent tribal leader Nawab

ISLAMABAD 00001293 002 OF 002

Akbar Bugti in August 2006. End Note.) Police used teargas against the demonstrators, which reportedly injured two lawyers. Representatives from both PPP and MMA joined the lawyers in their demonstration.

¶2. (U) Also on March 21, the news media published the reference against Justice Chaudhry, dated March 9 (available online at <http://www.dawn.com/2007/03/21/nat2.htm>). The alleged misconduct, which the reference says Prime Minister Aziz received from several sources, includes the Chief Justice:

- Using his position to secure several government jobs for his son for which his son was not qualified.
- Securing the use of official vehicles beyond his authorized entitlement of one 1600cc car.
- Making unprecedented requests for police motorcade protection.
- Demanding that senior bureaucrats meet him on arrival in provincial capitals.
- Demanding the use of planes and helicopters for domestic travel.
- Changing two verdicts after orally announcing them -- one variance allegedly involved an amount of 55 million rupees (approximately USD 900,000).
- Accepting accommodation from a litigant before the Supreme Court

¶3. (C) Comment: In spite of early rain and the cancellation of the Supreme Judicial Council hearing (rescheduled for April 3), lawyers' associations and political parties still managed to generate a good turnout. The allegations against Justice Chaudhry -- the bulk of which refer to his attempts to secure a government job for his son -- are no surprise (see Islamabad 637). Many of the accusations involve behavior typical of Pakistani officials. Indeed, Justice Chaudhry's attorneys have told us that they will not deny the allegations, but instead point out that the justices on the Supreme Judicial Council do the same things. One of the day's good news stories is the lack of violence from either demonstrators or police. End Comment.

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